

Farm Labor

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WINTER SLUMP HITS FARM EMPLOYMENT

Employment on the Nation's farms neared the winter low during the week, December 21-27, the Crop Reporting Board announced today. The 5,615,000 workers on farms that week reflected an 18 percent decline from the previous month. With most crops harvested across the country and Christmas falling in the survey week, there was only limited activity on most farms. The holiday stir with last-minute shopping trips made it easy for farmers to postpone their less urgent activities until later. However, people with livestock were at work every day, even on Christmas, meeting the needs of their animals.

December farm employment this year showed 25,000 fewer workers than for the same month last year. The usual level of farm employment in December in recent years has been slightly below 6 million workers. December farm employment hovered around 8 million workers during most years in the 1940's, followed by a period through the 50's when in each December there were slightly fewer farm workers. This type of trend is also reflected in farm employment levels for other months.

There were 4,633,000 family workers employed during the December survey week compared with 5,286,000 workers in November and 4,689,000 workers in December 1957. The number of family workers each December has gradually dropped from about 6.5 million in the 1940's to the more recent level of slightly less than 5 million persons.

Hired worker numbers in December were 36 percent below November which is near the average decline--38 percent--for the month. The December 1958 hired worker force of 982,000 was the highest for December since 1952 when more than a million hired workers were employed on farms during the survey week. During the 1940's the December hired labor force fluctuated between 1,200,000 and 1,500,000 workers.

Agricultural Activities

There was no White Christmas for most parts of the Nation in 1958 as mild and relatively dry weather during the survey week pushed the snow cover line to extreme northern areas and to higher elevations in mountainous country. Disappointment to children with new sleds may have been balanced by easier work conditions for their elders. The week's moderate to heavy precipitation was limited mostly to an area south of a line joining Richmond, Virginia, and Laredo, Texas, and to the Pacific Coast north of San Francisco, with totals ranging up to about 3 inches in both areas. The rains throughout much of the south helped restore soil moisture which had been below satisfactory levels in some sections for a long time. Rains were frequent in the Pacific Northwest. For most of the mid-continent area there was little or no precipitation and surface soil moisture was needed.

Temperatures averaged above normal west of a line joining Detroit, Michigan, and Iaredo, Texas. In the North Central regions temperatures ranged from 6 to 14 degrees above normal while in the Far West the entire month of December was unseasonably mild. This offered slight consolation to New Englanders who had one of the coldest Decembers since 1917. Temperatures at Caribou, Maine, have been below freezing since late November. Other Atlantic Coast States also experienced cooler than normal temperatures during the week December 21-27, with northern Florida readings 2 to 4 degrees below normal. Temperatures fell below zero over much of the Northeast from the 24th to the 27th. On the 25th, Pellston, Michigan, had a low of 23 degrees below zero and New York State experienced the coldest Christmas Day in 10 years.

Farm activity was limited in all areas of the country but, fair, mild weather in most areas west of the Mississippi permitted cleanup harvest operations in the southern sections. Cotton harvest was nearly completed in Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and the San Joaquin Valley of California but continued active in the Imperial Valley.

Farm work was mainly limited to routine winter chores in northern areas. Rain and the holidays delayed final completion of harvest in the lower Mississippi Valley. In Florida, too, harvest of citrus and vegetable crops was restricted during the week. Planting of vegetables for late winter and spring harvesting was increasing there, however. Field work in the southern vegetable areas of Texas was interrupted by showers at mid-week and harvesting generally came to a standstill during the holiday season. It's always harvest time somewhere in California, and the survey week was no exception, with many different vegetables and fruits being harvested.

While the survey week was a time for work for many farmers, for many more it was a week in which there was time to catch one's breath after another busy crop season which had been blessed with abundant production. Farmers could go about the winter chores of feeding and caring for their livestock with the smug knowledge that feed supplies would see them through until the green pastures of spring.

Employment by Geographic Regions

Total farm employment in December, down 18 percent nationally from a month earlier, reflected a decline in all 9 geographic regions. There was some regional variation in this decline with the largest drop of 32 percent occurring in the East South Central Region. The West South Central and South Atlantic regions also showed large decreases. The smallest decline from November of 9 percent occurred in the West North Central and Pacific regions. Declines in farm employment while varying geographically, generally reflected close to the usual seasonal drops in each region. Only in the East South Central region was the decline in total employment slightly more than usual. Compared with one year earlier, total farm employment was higher in 5 regions and lower in 4 regions.

Family labor numbers were down in all 9 regions in December as compared with November. This was also true for hired labor, with 3 regions showing greater than usual declines.

Wage Rates

Farm wage rates around January 1 were at record highs for the country as a whole. The seasonally adjusted farm wage rates index had advanced to 610 by January 1, 1959 compared with the previous January's index of 567. The gradual

advance in farm wage rates took place largely during the latter part of 1958. The index was at 567 in April, dropping one point to 566 in July but advanced to a record 594 last October. The index based on the period 1910-14=100 has been above 500 since January 1953. These index numbers take into consideration the fluctuation in all the various types of wage rates such as monthly, weekly, and hourly rates, thus providing a ready means of studying general trends.

Nationally, all individual types of farm wage rates were higher on January 1 than a year earlier with increases fairly uniform. Changes since October 1 were not all in the direction of higher wage rates. For instance, January 1 rates per week with board and room, per day without board and room, and per hour with house were all below the previous quarter. This was true partly because of a decline in demand for harvest labor. Also the hourly rate with house showed a sharp decline from October because the larger proportion of workers being paid at this rate in January was in the lower wage rate areas of the South. Most rates were higher than for October and continued to reflect the competitive bidding for permanent, full-time workers.

Geographically, the indexes of composite rates (farm wage rate index), which are weighted averages of all types of rates compared with the 1910-14=100 base, were above a year earlier on January 1 in all regions except the West South Central which was one point lower and the West North Central which was the same as last January. The January 1, 1959 regional indexes were also above October 1, 1958, except in the East South Central Region. Most categories of rates by regions were above January 1, 1958.

There is usually considerable variation in wage rates from State to State across the Nation and this was the situation on January 1. The rate per hour without board or room ranged from a high of \$1.25 in Washington and Connecticut to a low of \$.51 in South Carolina. In 29 States farm workers averaged \$1.00 or more per hour. The United States average was \$1.03 per hour. Per month rates with house averaged \$200 or more in 17 States with the highest rate of \$271 being paid in California. The tables on pages 10 and 11 contain the various rates paid throughout the country for 9 different categories of wages on January 1, 1958-59, while annual average wage rates for 1957 and 1958 are listed by States on pages 12 and 13. Careful study of these tables will reveal the geographical complexities of farm wage rates.

Farm employment and indexes for week of December 21-27, 1958,
United States, with comparisons

	: December : average : 1953-57 1/:	: December : 22-28, : 1957	: November : 23-29, : 1958	: December : 21-27, : 1958
FARM EMPLOYMENT (Thousands of persons):				
Total	5,869	5,640	6,817	5,615
Family labor	4,920	4,689	5,286	4,633
Hired labor	949	951	1,531	982
FARM EMPLOYMENT INDEXES (Adjusted for seasonal variation, 1910-14 = 100)				
Total	61	58	56	58
Family labor	61	58	55	57
Hired labor	62	62	58	64

1/ Employment during the last full calendar week ending at least one day before the end of the month.

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Farm wage rates, indexes, and related data, January 1, 1959,
United States, with comparisons 1/

	: October 1, : 1957	: January 1, : 1958	: October 1, : 1958	: January 1, : 1959
FARM WAGE RATES				
Per month with house	\$168.00	\$172.00	\$176.00	\$185.00
Per month with board and room	134.00	138.00	138.00	147.00
Per week with board and room	33.75	32.50	34.25	34.00
Per week without board or room	41.00	41.00	42.25	45.00
Per day with house	4.75	4.85	5.10	5.20
Per day with board and room	5.80	5.80	6.00	6.00
Per day without board or room	6.30	6.00	6.70	6.40
Per hour with house94	.73	.96	.78
Per hour without board or room84	.97	.88	1.03
Composite rate per hour 2/757	.804	.795	.865
FARM WAGE RATE INDEXES (1910-14=100)				
Adjusted for seasonal variation....	565	567	594	610
RELATED INDEXES (1910-14=100)				
Prices received by farmers 3/.....	242	244	255	246*
Ratio of prices received to farm wage rates	43	43	43	40

1/ Wage rates on the average refer to a date two or three days before the first of the month.

2/ Weighted average of all rates on a per hour basis.

3/ Average of the 15th of the given and the 15th of the previous month.

* December 15, 1958.

Farm wage rates by geographic regions, January 1, 1959, with comparisons

Geographic region	October 1, 1957	January 1, 1958	October 1, 1958	January 1, 1959
	Dollars	Dollars	Dollars	Dollars
PER MONTH WITH HOUSE				
New England	191.00	194.00	200.00	202.00
Middle Atlantic	188.00	187.00	194.00	194.00
East North Central	177.00	178.00	180.00	183.00
West North Central	168.00	170.00	172.00	172.00
Mountain	209.00	212.00	218.00	222.00
Pacific	263.00	264.00	266.00	269.00
PER MONTH WITH BOARD AND ROOM				
New England	147.00	146.00	150.00	150.00
Middle Atlantic	133.00	134.00	137.00	138.00
East North Central	132.00	132.00	131.00	134.00
West North Central	132.00	130.00	135.00	132.00
Mountain	159.00	157.00	165.00	164.00
Pacific	209.00	206.00	205.00	203.00
PER WEEK WITH BOARD AND ROOM				
New England	40.50	39.25	39.75	40.25
Middle Atlantic	35.25	34.75	36.25	36.75
PER WEEK WITHOUT BOARD OR ROOM				
New England	54.25	52.50	54.25	54.50
Middle Atlantic	48.25	48.00	49.25	50.25
PER DAY WITH HOUSE				
South Atlantic	4.55	4.65	4.65	4.90
East South Central	3.75	3.65	3.75	3.75
West South Central	5.30	5.30	5.50	5.40
PER DAY WITH BOARD AND ROOM				
East North Central	6.70	6.60	6.70	6.80
West North Central	6.90	6.60	6.90	6.60
PER DAY WITHOUT BOARD OR ROOM				
New England	9.50	9.10	9.70	9.50
Middle Atlantic	8.50	8.40	8.70	8.60
East North Central	8.30	8.10	8.30	8.50
West North Central	8.50	8.30	8.60	8.30
South Atlantic	5.30	5.50	5.50	5.60
East South Central	4.40	4.35	4.45	4.50
West South Central	6.10	6.00	6.20	6.00
Mountain	8.40	7.90	8.50	8.20
PER HOUR WITH HOUSE				
South Atlantic	--	.60	--	.61
East South Central	--	.51	--	.51
West South Central	--	.64	--	.64
Pacific	1.08	1.05	1.10	1.09
PER HOUR WITHOUT BOARD OR ROOM				
New England	1.12	1.12	1.12	1.15
Middle Atlantic	1.08	1.07	1.10	1.09
East North Central	1.06	1.06	1.06	1.07
West North Central	1.02	1.02	1.04	1.03
South Atlantic68	.72	.68	.73
East South Central58	.61	.60	.61
West South Central74	.75	.74	.75
Mountain	1.00	.94	.99	.94
Pacific	1.15	1.15	1.18	1.17

Index numbers of farm wage rates, rural living costs, and real farm wage rates, United States, 1910-58, (1910-14=100).

Year	Farm wage rates	Rural living costs ^{1/}	Real farm wage rates ^{2/}
1910	96	99	97
1911	98	99	99
1912	102	100	102
1913	104	100	104
1914	102	102	100
1915	102	104	98
1916	112	115	97
1917	141	143	99
1918	177	170	104
1919	206	202	102
1920	241	228	106
1921	156	164	95
1922	154	153	101
1923	177	156	113
1924	181	156	116
1925	183	161	114
1926	185	158	117
1927	185	155	119
1928	185	156	119
1929	187	154	121
1930	175	144	122
1931	133	124	107
1932	100	106	94
1933	89	108	82
1934	100	122	82
1935	110	124	89
1936	118	124	95
1937	133	128	104
1938	129	122	106
1939	129	120	108
1940	131	121	108
1941	160	130	123
1942	208	149	140
1943	274	166	165
1944	328	175	187
1945	366	182	201
1946	399	202	198
1947	424	237	179
1948	445	251	177
1949	430	243	177
1950	432	246	176
1951	481	268	179
1952	508	271	187
1953	517	270	191
1954	508	274	185
1955	519	273	190
1956	542	278	195
1957	560	286	196
1958	582	292	199

^{1/} Prices paid by farmers for commodities used in living.
^{2/} Wage rates divided by rural living costs.

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